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**“SOME FEW MILES FROM EDINBURGH”:
COMMEMORATING THE SCENES OF *THE*
GENTLE SHEPHERD IN RAMSAY COUNTRY**

Craig Lamont

In Edinburgh, Allan Ramsay is remembered with several markers in tangible locations, for example with the portrait monument in West Princes Street Gardens (1865) and among the many other writers on the Scott Monument (1844/6).¹ Outside Edinburgh, the situation is not so concrete, and the mode of commemoration differs.² Where the Edinburgh monuments portray Ramsay himself, commemorations in the countryside were based instead on his chief dramatic work *The Gentle Shepherd; A Scots Pastoral Comedy* (Edinburgh: Mr. Tho. Ruddiman for the author, 1725), and a culture of commemoration referencing the play, from Ramsay’s death in 1758 onwards, can be mapped in the countryside south of the capital, in what is now called “Ramsay Country.”²

No setting for the play is specified in Ramsay’s manuscript drafts, and in his fair copy and the first edition the only clue he gives is the brief note “Scene, a Shepherds Village and Fields some few Miles from Edinburgh.”³ On 8 April 1724, while writing the drama, Ramsay wrote to William Ramsay of Templehill complaining about the distractions of Edinburgh life:

The mob of mankind afford me a continual diversion and this place, the citie, is crowded with Merry Andrews; fools and fops of

¹ See Craig Lamont, “Allan Ramsay & Edinburgh: commemoration in the city of forgetting,” *Scottish Literary Review*, 10.1 (2018): 117–137; and cf. also Murray Pittock and Craig Lamont, “Spatial Humanities and Memory Studies: Mapping Edinburgh in the First Age of the Enlightenment,” *SSL*, 42.2 (2016): 152–163.

² For discussion of this term, see the introduction to this special issue.

³ The draft MSS is Edinburgh University Library Laing II.212*; the fair copy manuscript, National Library of Scotland MS 15972, and the first edition, p. [vi], both have this note with the list of characters, as do most subsequent editions.

all sizes, intermix'd with a few that can think, and compose the comical medley of actors.⁴

He longed, he said, to revisit the scenic countryside, where “the mixture of rural musick echoed agreeable from the surrounding hills, and all nature appeared in gayety.”⁵ Setting the drama in a named region was a break from the pastoral tradition, which, like many of Ramsay’s ventures, helped enhance the literary reputation of Scotland. Crucially, the ambiguity (“some few miles from Edinburgh”) resists easy identification. As this essay will explore, contesting commemorations flourished in the Pentland Hills, some more successfully than others. An epistolary tug-of-war over the famous scenes was played out in periodicals, while more claims and counterclaims appeared in early nineteenth century Ramsay editions.

Ramsay died in January 1758 and was buried in Greyfriars kirkyard, where a memorial plaque was later placed. A year later, Sir James Clerk of Penicuik erected a stone obelisk to Ramsay’s memory at Penicuik House.⁶ The monument still stands, and it is described in much the same way in most biographical sketches of Ramsay throughout the nineteenth century.⁷ The Penicuik House website follows in this tradition, describing it as “built in 1759 by Sir James Clerk, 3rd Baronet, in commemoration of the poet Allan Ramsay, a frequent visitor to Penicuik House.”⁸ And while the date “ANNO MDCCLIX” does appear beneath Ramsay and Clerk’s names on one side, the other side bears the inscription “AD MDCCLVI” (1756). It is likely that the monument was erected by Sir James Clerk in 1756, following the death of his father, Ramsay’s friend Sir John (1676–1755), and that Ramsay’s name was added later in an opportunistic moment of commemoration.⁹ This would explain the seeming anonymity of this obelisk, which, elegant as it is, does not appear connected to Ramsay’s life or work in any symbolic way. Significantly, no one had ever laid claim for

⁴ *The Works of Allan Ramsay, with Life ... by George Chalmers*, 3 vols (London, Edinburgh, and Dublin: A. Fullarton, 1851), III: 244

⁵ *The Works of Allan Ramsay. With Life of the Author by George Chalmers; and an essay on his genius and writings by Lord Woodhouselee*. v. 3 (London, Edinburgh, and Dublin: A. Fullarton and co., 1851), p. 244

⁶ Lamont (2018), p. 128.

⁷ 1759 has often been given as the date the monument was erected and dedicated to Ramsay: see, e.g., *Lives of Eminent Scotsmen. Part I. Poets* (London: Thomas Boys, 1821), 103; Oliphant Smeaton, *Allan Ramsay [Famous Scots Series]* (Edinburgh and London: Oliphant Anderson & Ferrier, 1896), 119: the year is implied in the line “Clerk ... erected at his family seat at Penicuik an obelisk to his memory.”

⁸ See: <https://www.penicuikhouse.com/preservationtrust>.

⁹ My thanks to Dr. Robert Betteridge of the National Library of Scotland for helping clear this up.

this location as the setting for Ramsay's pastoral. For comparison with other sites, it should be noted that Penicuik House is approximately 11 miles south of Edinburgh's Old Town. The location of the House and nearby obelisk is shown in Fig. 1, with the obelisk itself depicted in Fig. 2.

A monument of some form or another in this location had been envisaged by Sir John Clerk as early as 1738, when he wrote about "the Avenue which runs Southward from the House through the park of Coldshoulders." He explained that "if the planting grow, and the Avenue terminat on any object, as a porch or ruine, it will make, in time, a very good figure from the House."¹⁰ This reinforces the point that, despite its name on maps and in literary biographies, the Penicuik obelisk was not in

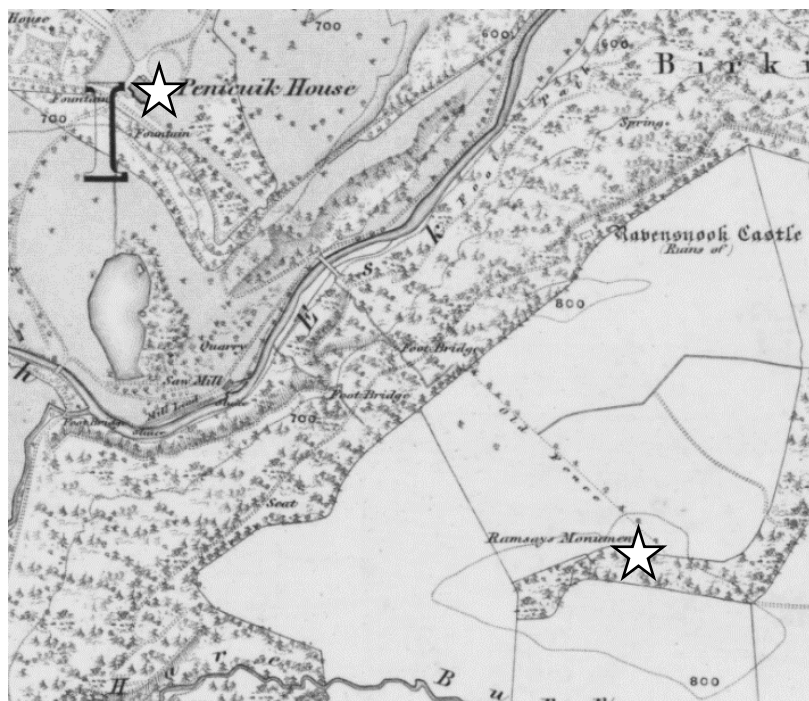


Fig. 1. Section from the OS Six-inch first edition (Scotland), Edinburghshire, Sheet 18 (1854). The white stars show Penicuik House and the obelisk.

¹⁰ *Memoirs of the Life of Sir John Clerk of Penicuik, Baronet* (Edinburgh: T. and A. Constable for the Scottish History Society, 1892), p. 148. Spelling reproduced as per this edition, based on Clerk's manuscripts.



Fig. 2. The obelisk monument, Penicuik, with inscription to Allan Ramsay dated 1759.
 Photograph courtesy of Dr. Brianna Robertson-Kirkland.

the first instance intended as “Ramsay’s Monument.” It is also somewhat ironic that Sir James chose this design as the “object” of his late father’s plans. In 1741-2, Sir John had written of obelisks that he

never cared to look at them, being a reproach to the artificers of those times, that in their designs could deviate so much from nature, which they had every moment before their eyes: such clumsy monuments as these, I am sure, can never communicate to us any instruction.¹¹

We will never know if he would have approved of his son’s obelisk, but the historic misappropriation by many authors (present author included) of the monument as being built for Ramsay certainly chimes with Sir John’s worry that they “can never communicate to us any instruction.”

This is where we leave Penicuik House and travel around 4 miles south-west to Newhall House, near Carlops. In 1919, Horatio Brown covered in detail the architectural changes to the Newhall estate as well as successive ownership. By the time Ramsay visited, the property was owned by Sir David Forbes, who undertook extensive renovation work on the dilapidated buildings, reserving attic chambers for Ramsay, William Tyler, and others in the social circle of Sir David’s son, John Forbes.¹² The previous owner, Dr. Alexander Pennecuik (1652–1722), became part of this friendly group and apparently spent more time on the property under Forbes’s ownership than he ever did during his own.¹³

Confusingly, another Alexander Pennecuik (*d.* 1730) had poems printed in Edinburgh which bear some resemblance to Ramsay’s, particularly his *Corydon and Cochriana* (1723), a dedicatory pastoral on the marriage of James, Duke of Hamilton and Lady Anne Cochran. Ramsay’s equivalent, *The Nuptials*, was printed the same year.

¹¹ *Antiquities in Lincolnshire; being the Third Volume of the Bibliotheca Topographica Britannica*. (London: J. Nichols, 1790), p. 74.

¹² Horatio F. Brown, “Newhall on the North Esk, with its Artistic and Literary Associations,” *Scottish Historical Review*, 16.63 (April 1919): 182–3.

¹³ Brown, 182.



Fig. 3. Composite image from the OS Six-inch first edition (Scotland).

The north side of the River Esk, showing the Newhall Estate, is from the Edinburghshire survey, Sheet 17 (1853), and the south side is from the Peebles-shire survey, Sheet 2 (1858), showing the “Ramsay Inn,” now known as the Ramsay Hotel, in Carlops.

However, Ramsay’s acquaintance, Dr. Pennecuik, was a poet too. What is more, in the grounds of Newhall House, there is an obelisk sundial with the following inscription:

Here ALEXr: PENNECUIK
of NEWHALL, M.D.
is said
to have given
ALLAN RAMSAY
the Plot of
his celebrated
Pastoral Comedy of
THE GENTLE SHEPHERD.

The claim is seldom given much attention, as can be surmised by the doubts raised even in the late Victorian biography of Dr. Pennecuik, though we can hardly discount the influence of Ramsay’s friends on his work.¹⁴ More important is the transformation of the house and estate into an iconographic shrine to *The Gentle Shepherd*. On the opposite side of the sundial is another inscription:

Here
ALLAN RAMSAY

¹⁴ George Atherton Aitken, ‘Pennecuik, Alexander’, *Dictionary of National Biography* v. 44 (Macmillan, 1895), p. 323.

recited to
his distinguished and
literary Patrons,
as he
Proceeded with them
the Scenes of
his unequalled
PASTORAL COMEDY,
amid the
Objects and Characters
introduced into it.

A final inscription is a rhyming play on the passage of time, signed “R. B. 1810.” This, and all the exterior allusions to *The Gentle Shepherd* at Newhall, which include two stone plaques embedded into the walls of the gardens, inscribed with extracts from the play, were likely the design of Robert Brown (1758-c. 1833), who took up residence towards the end of the eighteenth century. In the house, the ceiling of the ground-floor library boasts a painting, probably by Alexander Carse, showing the members of the Worthies Club, including Ramsay, John Forbes, and William Aikman in Leith Tavern. Around the painting of the Club members, Brown added “a pretty frame of grapes, crossed pipes and crooks, and corner paterae,” pastoral symbolism discussed by Colin McWilliam.¹⁵ The Worthy or Worthies Club is thought to have inspired Ramsay’s naming of Sir William Worthy, though this, as we will see below, becomes fiercely contested.¹⁶

The most commonly cited claim made for Newhall as the heartland of Ramsay’s drama was by William Tytler (1711–1792), in his *Poetical Remains of James the First, King of Scotland* (1783). After sketching out Ramsay’s additional cantos to *Christ’s Kirk on the Green*, Tytler turns his attention to *The Gentle Shepherd* and dismantles the notion that it “was the joint composition of some wits with whom Ramsay had conversed.” He goes on to reminisce on his own youthful days at “Newhall, near Pentland Hills, where the scenes of this pastoral poem are laid.”¹⁷

Arguably the best visual afterlife of Ramsay’s play, and its topographical setting, is in the twelve aquatint plates drawn by David Allan

¹⁵ Colin McWilliam, *Lothian: except Edinburgh. The Medieval Churches by Christopher Wilson* [The Buildings of Scotland] (London: Penguin, 1978 [1980]), p. 355

¹⁶ *The Works of Alexander Pennecuik, Esq., of New-Hall, M. D.; containing the Description of Tweeddale, and Miscellaneous Poems* (Leith: A. Allardice, 1815), 27.

¹⁷ *Poetical Remains of James the First, King of Scotland* (Edinburgh: J. and E. Balfour, 1783), p. 190.



Fig. 4a (left) frontispiece illustration for *The Gentle Shepherd* (Glasgow: A. Foulis, 1788); Fig 4b (right), detail showing the Ramsay obelisk.

(1744–1796) for the celebrated Foulis edition of *The Gentle Shepherd*. The Allan views complement Ramsay’s narrative with a study of the characters during key moments, and, though the settings are never named in the text, they are generally held to represent the Carlops and Newhall locale, and Allan seems to have visited Newhall specifically for this project, probably in 1785.¹⁸ There is not space here to examine each of Allan’s plates, or any subsequent portrayals of the supposed scenery at length, but in the decoration round the frontispiece portrait to the Foulis edition (Fig. 4a), one small detail seems to have been overlooked, the unmistakable image of the Penicuik House obelisk (Fig. 4b).

This use of the obelisk is interesting, in light of the case made above that the monument had been erected before Ramsay’s death. Commemorative illustrations like this were pivotal in the process of portraying the obelisk as solely Ramsay’s, rather than Ramsay’s in part. The monument is not mentioned specifically in the Foulis text, so its presence here indicates that its appearance and its significance as a Ramsay landmark was common knowledge. In the front matter to the Foulis edition, Allan’s dedication, to the artist Gavin Hamilton, makes general claims about his working visit to Ramsay Country,

¹⁸ *Edinburgh Magazine, or Literary Miscellany*, 17 (June 1801), 420; Allan Cunningham, *The Lives of the Most Eminent British Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, 6 vols (London: John Murray, 1830-1833), VI: 21-48 (33-34).

in the neighbourhood of Pentland hills, a few miles from Edinburgh, where the shepherds to this day sing his songs, and the old people remember him reciting his verses.¹⁹

These sentimental turns have also shaped the legacy of *The Gentle Shepherd*: promoting an indefatigable oral culture which, a mere thirty years after Ramsay's death, was held in the highest esteem. That "the old people remember" Ramsay reciting his work is believable. After all, it was William Tytler's reminiscences of this very experience, quoted above, which convinced a generation of scholars and tourists that Newhall was the setting Ramsay had in mind.

In the 1790s, as successive parts of Sir John Sinclair's influential *Statistical Survey of Scotland* reached publication, rival parishes claimed Ramsay for their locality. In 1794, in a footnote in his entry for Penicuik, the Rev. Thomas M'Courty quoted and endorsed Tytler's claims that Newhall was "distinguished by being chosen for the scenes of the celebrated pastoral comedy."²⁰ However, a year later, the Revs. Mr William Torrence, minister of Glencross, that is Glencorse, and Dr John Walker, minister of Colinton and Edinburgh's professor of natural history, published their entry for Glencross, "about 7 miles west from Edinburgh." This introduced an alternative cultural landscape for *The Gentle Shepherd*, the estate of "Old Woodhouselee" and the ancient Tower of Fulford, then "the property of Alexander Fraser Tyler" (Fig. 5).²¹



Fig. 5. From Ordnance Survey 6-inch (Scotland), Edinburghshire, Sheet 12 (1854), with the Woodhouselee estate marked.

¹⁹ *The Gentle Shepherd* (Glasgow: A. Foulis, 1788), ii.

²⁰ Thomas M'Courty, "Parish of Pennycuik," in Sir John Sinclair, ed., *The Statistical Account of Scotland*, 10.30 (1794): 419–432 (428–429).

²¹ William Torrence and John Walker, "Parish of Glencross, in *Statistical Account of Scotland*, 15.21 (1795): 435–446 (441).

Alexander Fraser Tytler (1747–1813), later as a judge styled Lord Woodhouselee, was son of William Tytler, from whom he had inherited the Woodhouselee estate. The ministers state their claim at length:

the scene of that beautiful pastoral, *The Gentle Shepherd*, is generally supposed to have been laid in this parish. There is certainly a very strict coincidence between the actual scenery of this part of the country, and the local circumstances mentioned in the poem. The general description of the scene, as given at the beginning of the pastoral, is “A shepherd’s village and fields, some few miles from Edinburgh.” The West-Port, mentioned in the first scene as the road from the village to market, fixes the bearing of the country to the vicinity of the Pentland hills (*ibid.*, 442).

More specifically, the “craigy bield” and the “trotting burnie” of Ramsay’s play are likened to “the scenery in the neighbourhood of Woodhouselee, and Boghall burns.” For the first time, one of the characters of the pastoral is drawn into comparison with an identifiable individual, when it is suggested that the

antient tower of Fulford ... and formerly mansion house of a knight, may well countenance the supposition of Ramsay’s having here fixed the imaginary residence of his Sir William Worthy (*ibid.*, 442–443).

A footnote identifies the “knight” as Sir William Purves, Solicitor-General for Scotland, though since Purves died in 1685 he could hardly have been Ramsay’s model. Indeed Torrence and Walker seem markedly ambivalent about the credibility of their claims for Glencross:

After all, however, this appropriation must be allowed to be entirely conjectural, and to rest more upon fancy, pleasing itself in clothing its own pictures in the garb of reality, than upon any basis of evidence. This at least may certainly be affirmed, that if the poet intended at all to appropriate the scenery of his pastoral, farther than to the general aspect of the country in the neighbourhood of the Pentland hills, there are no actual scenes which so perfectly correspond to his descriptions, as those in the neighbourhood of Woodhouselee (*ibid.*, 444).

In their next section, on “Eminent Men” of Glencross, Torrence and Walker record the life and works of William Tytler, including his ascription of the “whole merit of the *Gentle Shepherd*” to Ramsay, of “which, by detraction or by mistake, he had been in part deprived” (*ibid.*, 444). They had had evidently read Tytler’s comments in his 1783 edition of James I, but astonishingly they glide over or suppress Tytler’s statement, in the same publication, that the play was set at Newhall.

A year later, in 1796, Mr. M’Courty of Penicuik offered a rejoinder, when the *Statistical Account* included a lengthy “Appendix for Penicuik,”

added “in consequence of a letter from the Hon. Lord Eskgrove ... stating some inaccuracies in the account of New Hall.”²² Lord Eskgrove was Sir David Rae (1729–1804), grandson of David Forbes, the proprietor of Newhall during Ramsay’s time, and also a judge.

M’Court’s 32-page appendix gives an in-depth-description of the history, occupants, and surrounding landscape of Newhall, with recurrent reference to Ramsay’s pastoral, copious quotation, and some indulgent speculation comparing Sir William Worthy, in his walk around his ruinous estate, to Lord Es Grove’s grandfather David Forbes, who had acquired Newhall in disrepair. Whereas the *Account* of Glencross had introduced William Purves as the model for Ramsay’s character, this new appendix considers that

the name Worthy was given the proprietor, in compliment to Sir David Forbes.... William has evidently been placed before it, in preference to any other Christian name, merely for the sake of alliteration (*ibid.*, 613).

Summary judgement is given against the rival claims for Glencross, a place which, it is asserted, Ramsay “in all probability never saw, or even heard of, in his life” (*ibid.*, 619). More helpful is the notion that the popularity of *The Gentle Shepherd* inspired a spate of commemorative names:

as the manners cannot be preserved, it was desirable to ascertain, at least, the spot from whence Ramsay had got those pastoral descriptions, and scenes, which are so inimitably and faithfully copied. Accordingly the *Gentle Shepherd* no sooner drew admiration, than every trifling streamlet, in the direction of the Pentland Hills, was honoured with a Habbie’s How (*ibid.*).

If nothing else, the “Appendix” gives a useful account of the birth of Ramsay Country in the Pentlands.

But the debate was far from over. Until this point the to-ing and fro-ing had been contained to the footnotes and appendices of the *Statistical Account*, or, earlier, in William Tytler’s writings on James I. At the turn of the century the matter became much more heated following the publication in 1800 of *The Poems of Allan Ramsay*, in two volumes, edited with a new life by George Chalmers, and with an essay by Alexander Fraser Tytler, Lord Woodhouselee himself. Tytler’s “Remarks on the Writings of Allan Ramsay” revive the claims made in Torrence and Walker’s account of Glencross, noting that the country people are “eager to point out to the inquiring stranger” the *Gentle Shepherd* settings, such as “*Sir William’s ancient tower*, ruined in the civil wars, but since rebuilt,” and again

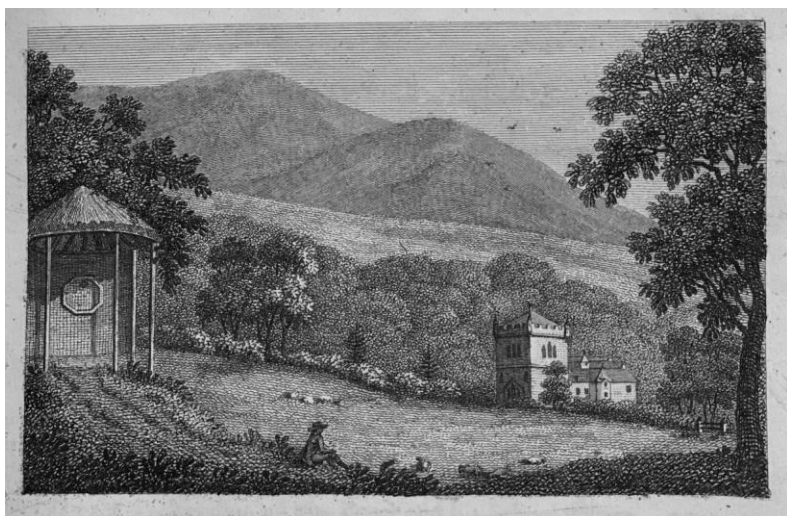
²² [Thomas M’Court], “Appendix to Vol. XVII,” in *Statistical Account*, 17 (1796): 597–628 (597).

giving a footnote glossing Ramsay's Sir William as "Sir William Purves of Woodhouselee, whose estate was forfeited by the Protector, for his adherence to the royal cause," but who "regained it at the restoration."²³

Equally noteworthy in the 1800 edition is one of its illustrations. After mentioning that frontispiece taken from a Ramsay portrait that Tytler owned, the Advertisement notes that

there is added, as a tail-piece, an engraving of the rustic temple which has been dedicated by that gentleman, who happily possesses the supposed scene of the *Gentle Shepherd*, to the *place*, and *poet* (*ibid.*, I: iii).

In the tail-piece (Fig. 6), a rustic temple, or summer house, is shown on the left, while a seated figure takes in the scene with Fulford Tower in the background. The location of this summer house is marked on the OS map of Woodhouselee in Fig. 5.



**Fig. 6. Tail-piece to Chalmers's life, in
Poems of Allan Ramsay, 2 vols (1800), I: clvii.**

Tytler's shrine to Ramsay's memory must have survived as late as 1894, when J. Logie Robertson ("Hugh Halliburton") described it at length. Logie Robertson's account portrays the romantic scenery around Hillend and Woodhouselee as "the home of the Gentle Shepherd" and, more specifically, the road "from the buckstane on the Braids to Nine-

²³ George Chalmers, ed., *The Poems of Allan Ramsay, 2 vols* (London: Cadell and Davies, 1800), I: cliii.

mile-burn or Carlops” as “the land of Allan Ramsay.” This latter distinction at least gives precedence to Carlops and, by extension, New Hall, as the places Ramsay was known to have visited. Logie Robertson draws a sentimental distinction between Allan “the laureate of Canongate publics” and “the pastoral Allan, Scotland’s own Theocritus, the callan that paints auld Nature to the nines.”²⁴ We are given an intimate portrayal of “the Whitehouselee [*sic*] temple,” and its

unbarked fir branches, nicely and compactly fitted into a sort of octagonal kiosk, which opens on three sides to the east with an extensive and really charming view of the valley of the Esks [...] The ‘temple’ is a snug little summer-house perched on a shelf of the descending hills, where one might sit in peace, disturbed only by the sound of a rookery overhead, and meditate, half-pleased and half-curious, the inscription on the votive table which the ‘temple’ protects:—

ALLANO RAMSAY ET GENIO LOCI.

Here midst those scenes that taught thy Doric muse
Her sweetest song; the hills, the woods, and stream,
Where beauteous Peggy strayed, listening the while
Her Gentle Shepherd’s tender tale of love;
Scenes which thy pencil, true to nature, gave
To live for ever. Sacred be this shrine,
And unprofaned by ruder hands the stone
That owes its honours to thy deathless name (*ibid*, 130).

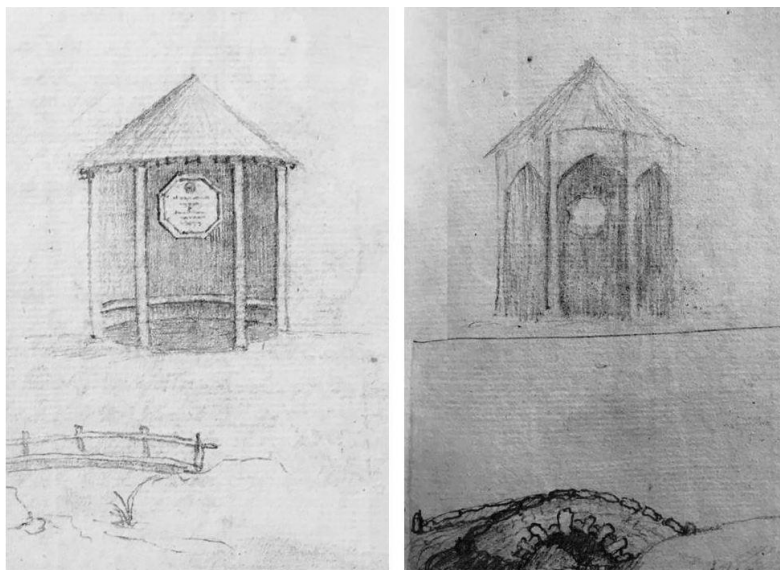
Because of their romantic nature these eight lines are more useful in terms of the cultural afterlife of Ramsay, and less so as “proof” of authenticity. Line 3 is discussed further below.

Among the surviving papers of Lord Woodhouselee in the National Library of Scotland one can find pencil sketches of the summer house [Figs. 7a, 7b] and the internal plaque [Fig. 7c], as well as a commonplace book containing a copy of Ramsay’s long poem “The Monk and the Miller’s Wife.”²⁵ These sources, which seem to have been unused by those researching these contested sites, put beyond doubt the identity of the architect and owner of this unusual, wooden memorial. What is confusing is that Lord Woodhouselee would embark on such a scheme in the first place, knowing, as he must have, his father’s reminiscences of New Hall and the area further south which had already been established as the more likely setting. This question, too, is further discussed below. But before

²⁴ “Hugh Haliburton” [J. Logie Robertson]. “On Pentland’s Ridge,” in his *Furth in Field: A Volume of Essays on the Life, Language and Literature of Old Scotland* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1894), 125-130 (126-126).

²⁵ The summer house, NLS Acc. 11737/2, f. 11v; 12, 39, the plaque, NLS Acc. 11737/2, f. 37; the commonplace book, . NLS Acc. 11737/4, f. 170v.

considering further the hostility which the Chalmers-Woodhouselee edition would receive, it is worth considering this rustic shrine on its own terms.



Figs. 7a (left) and 7b (right). Draft designs in pencil of the summer house or rustic shrine to Ramsay at Woodhouselee. NLS Acc. 11737/2, f. 11v-12. Reproduced by permission of the National Library of Scotland

Summer houses like this became popular as rustic seats or shelters for reflection. Texts like the *Illustrated Catalogue of Rustic Summer Houses* (1875) showcase designs remarkably similar to the one in Woodhouselee, and others, such as *Rustic Carpentry* (1907), offer explanations on how they are built.²⁶ William Cowper's famous summer house in Olney, Buckinghamshire has been sketched, engraved and photographed through the ages, but, unlike the shrine in question, it offered that poet a place to compose his work. Nicola Watson's recent book takes the example of Cowper's summerhouse and others like it to illustrate the ways in which "anti-domestic retreats have typically been mythologized by writers themselves, and in turn by their admirers, as 'escapes.'"²⁷ William Hamilton's "On a Summer-House in my own Garden" and Gilbert West's

²⁶ J. Caven Fox, *Illustrated Catalogue of Rustic Summer Houses etc.* (London: 1875), 1; Paul N. Hasluck, *Rustic Carpentry, with numerous engravings and diagrams* (London: Cassell and Company, 1907).

²⁷ Nicola J. Watson, *The Author's Effects: On Writer's House Museums* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 163.

“Inscription on a Summer-House” both promote an escape from the city into the open spaces for health and prosperity.²⁸

These works contained the descriptions of sites the poets had visited themselves. Lord Woodhouselee, on the other hand, erected a wooden monument to the memory of a poet who had been dead for decades. His summer house is more interesting for its role in extending the geographical catchment area for Ramsay’s cultural memory. And it worked. The rustic seat, and the marble tablet bearing the inscription shown in Fig. 7c below, were praised in John Stoddart’s *Remarks on Local Scenery & Manners in Scotland* (1801). “Few works,” he wrote, “more strongly prove the force of local allusion, and peculiar description, than the Gentle Shepherd.”²⁹ As



Fig. 7c. Draft design in pencil of the plaque sheltered by the shrine to Ramsay at Woodhouselee. NLS Acc. 11737/2, f. 37. Reproduced by permission of the National Library of Scotland

²⁸ James Paterson, ed., *The Poems and Songs of William Hamilton of Bangour* (Edinburgh: Thomas George Stevenson, 1850), 115; *The Works of the British Poets*, 9 (London: J. & A. Arch, 1795), 494.

²⁹ John Stoddart, *Remarks on Local Scenery & Manners in Scotland During the Years 1799 and 1800* (London: William Miller, 1801), 139–140.

late as 1859 the Woodhouselee locale is mentioned as being attractive to pleasure parties in the summer months, not only for the Ramsay connection, but “owing to its contiguity to the city of Edinburgh.”³⁰

Others less keen on this shift in the landscape of Ramsay’s memory also took notice, and a series of attacks on the credibility of the site ensued. The regular monthly format of James Sibbald’s *Edinburgh Magazine, or Literary Miscellany* opened with an ongoing series “Description of the View,” with a full-page frontispiece engraving of a well-known Scottish building or antiquity followed by an article about it, of anywhere from two to ten pages. In March 1801, this slot began featuring, though not every month, engravings of scenes round Newhall, with lengthy descriptions of the country and close comparison with Ramsay’s play. The first month featured the “Craigy Bield,” mentioned in the prologue to *The Gentle Shepherd*, Act 1, Scene 1. April brought a “View of the Harbour Craig,” alongside yet more descriptions and an attack on the Woodhouselee claims found in “a late laboured edition of Ramsay’s Works.” Interestingly, the magazine ran these new, allegedly more accurate, descriptions of Ramsay’s pastoral simulataneously with serialising Tytler’s “Remarks” from the 1800 edition that it was denouncing. June brought “The Washing Green at New Hall,” when the writer of the descriptions made reference to David Allan’s fine plates in the Foulis edition, giving details of Allan’s visit to Newhall “about sixteen years ago for the purposes of collecting scenes, and figures, on the spot.”³¹ November 1801 brought “Mary’s Linn.” And so the series continued, intermittently, till 1803, when the magazine was transferred from Sibbald to Constable. While the earlier articles are unsigned, the engravings are credited to what looks like “R.B. del.” and “R.Scott sculp.,” and in the issue for June 1802, the description of Habbys’s How is signed “R. B.,” that is Robert Brown of Newhall.³²

A brief exchange early in 1802 draws the contesting sites into sharper focus. In January 1802, Brown had attacked the identification with Purves and Woodhouselee, writing that Ramsay was never at “this ancient tower; which, it is believed, did not exist in his day.” The next month included a letter to the editor, with an “Authentic Account of Sir William Purves of Woodhouselee,” by Sir Alexander Purves of Purves, taking issue with Brown’s persistent belittlement of his ancestor and asserting in a footnote that the central tower was between 200 and 300 years old (see Figs. 5 and 6).³³ Purves counters Brown’s attack on William Purves’s character, and,

³⁰ Allan Ramsay, *The Gentle Shepherd: ... with ... numerous illustrations*, (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1859), xviii.

³¹ *Edinburgh Magazine, or Literary Miscellany*, 17 (June 1801), 420.

³² *Edinburgh Magazine*, 18 (June 1802): 422.

³³ Sir Alexander Purves, *Edinburgh Magazine*, 18 (February 1802): 84-86.

though cautious himself about Purves as Ramsay's model for Sir William Worthy, quotes a much less cautious letter from the Rev. Dr. John Walker (of the Glencross *Statistical Account* entry) who fully endorsed the identification, based on local gossip he had heard as a young minister many years earlier. Brown responded right away, in the March issue, arguing that, *The Gentle Shepherd* was set "at the time of the Commonwealth," Ramsay "could not have drawn the manners and behaviour of his 'Knight' from one living at a period so long prior to his own."³⁴ Brown characteristically doubles down on his insistence that the scenery around Newhall was the closest match to the descriptions in the play, offering to give Sir Alexander a tour of the area, "to convince him of their minute coincidence with the engravings and descriptions" (*ibid.*, 194).

A more embarrassing blow to the Woodhouselee site was reported by Robert Forsyth in *The Beauties of Scotland* (1805-8):

when the Editor of this Work, a few years ago, with some friends, visited the spot, he made enquiry at some country people whom he found cutting grass at no great distance beneath the water-fall, whether Habbie's How was in that neighbourhood? But, to the no small mortification of the whole party, who had gone thither upon a pedestrian poetical pilgrimage, it was found that these rustics had never heard of any such place. There is no doubt, therefore, that the term Habbie's How in the Gentle Shepherd is altogether imaginary; and it is extremely probably that the general scenery is so too; with this exception, that it seems to refer to the tract of the Pentland hills.³⁵

Forsyth's anecdote illustrates, however, that an emerging tradition of literary tourism connected Ramsay to Woodhouselee, and that, however it got started, the authenticity of the location had been effectively approved and enhanced by the 1800 edition of Ramsay's *Works*.

This battle over "Ramsay Country" seems to have been won in 1808, with the appearance of a new two-volume illustrated edition of *The Gentle Shepherd*.³⁶ Burns Martin called it "the most elaborate edition of Ramsay's

³⁴ Robert Brown, "Remarks on Sir Alexander Purves's Account of Sir William Prves, and the Supposed Scenery of the Gentle Shepherd," *Edinburgh Magazine*, 18 (March 1802), 192-194 (192).

³⁵ Robert Forsyth, *The Beauties of Scotland: containing a clear and full account of the agriculture, commerce, mines, and manufactures of the population, cities, towns, villages, &c. of each county*, 5 vols (Edinburgh: Thomson Bonar and John Brown, 1805-1808), I: 248.

³⁶ *The Gentle Shepherd, A Pastoral Comedy; with illustrations of the scenery; an appendix, containing the memoirs of David Allan, the Scots Hogarth; besides original, and other poems connected with the illustrations, and a comprehensive glossary. To which are prefixed, an authentic life of Allan Ramsay, and an inquiry*

pastoral,” because of its illustrations and audacious, detailed descriptions of the scenery, and it certainly had the most elaborate subtitle of any Ramsay edition.³⁷ Nine of the twelve views had previously been been published in the *Edinburgh Magazine*, and it is evident that this new edition was the work of Robert Brown of Newhall (*Gentle Shepherd*, 1808, I: xiii). The dedication “To the memory of Sir David Forbes of New Hall, Knight” sits above the lines from the play in which Sir William Worthy is revealed (“The Knight returns again!”), in a bold reiteration of Forbes as Ramsay’s model (I: [v]). What this edition did for the first time, however, was provide a map locating scenes from the play, in an area said to begin at its “north-eastern, or nearest extremity ... nine Scots, or twelve English miles, south-westward from *Edinburgh*” (I: 209; Fig. 8). The map is oriented with south at the top, but matches the locale of Newhall and Carlops in Fig. 3.

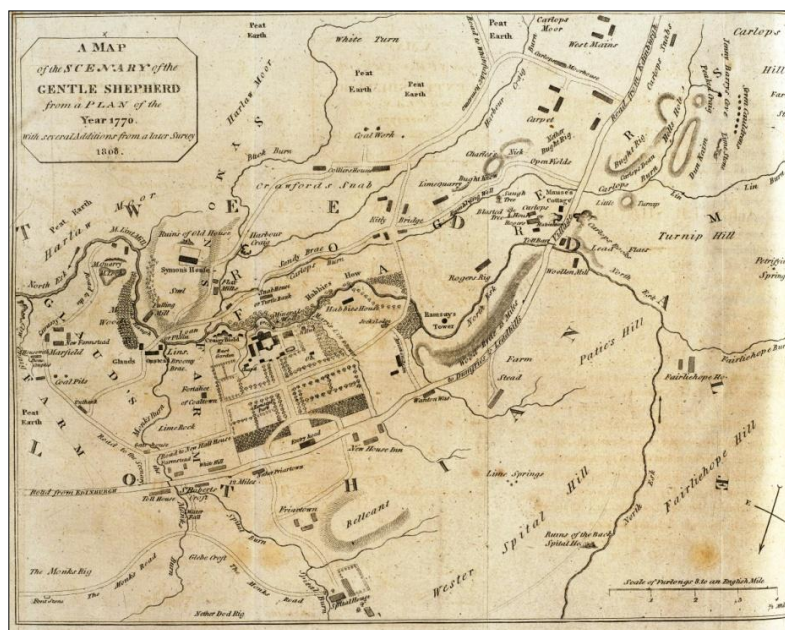


Fig. 8. A Map of the Scenary of the Gentle Shepherd from a Plan of the Year 1770. With several Additions from a later Survey 1808 (facing I: 209).

into the origin of pastoral poetry; the propriety of the rules prescribed for it, and the practice of Ramsay v.1 (Edinburgh: Abernathy & Walker for William Martin, W. Creech, A. Constable & co., 1808).

³⁷ Burns Martin, “A Bibliography of the Writings of Allan Ramsay,” *Records of the Glasgow Bibliographical Society*, 10 (1931): 80-82 (no. 267).

As literary cartography this is an important moment for the meeting of print culture and tourism that maintained the legacy of Ramsay's chief work. It was also the ultimate blow in the battleground: most subsequent editors lean towards this as the preferred site.³⁸ So blatant was Brown's effort in his new edition to reclaim the Ramsay location for Newhall that one of the early reviews was perhaps sarcastic in its support for his attack on Woodhouselee:

The inhabitants of the adjoining parish Glencross, however, animated doubtless by the instigations of the enemy of mankind, the great original liar, Satan, fell, at what time we are not informed, into a most damnable and dangerous heresy, setting up a Baal of their own invention in the person of sir William Purves of Woodhouselee.³⁹

The reviewer dare not speculate to "what extremities the deadly feuds which hence originated might have been carried, had not the two octavos now before us been published to put a final termination to the dispute."⁴⁰

It is important to note that the rustic shrine placed in the estate and depicted in the 1800 edition was specifically targeted in Brown's edition, where it is described as "a trifling hut of sticks and straw" (*Poems*, 1808, I: 106). The inscribed verse inside Woodhouselee's temple is also sneered at, specifically line 3 ("Where beauteous Peggy stray'd..."):

Peggy must have "stray'd" indeed! if she was found "here," on the other side of the Pentland Hills; and the houses of Glau and Symon, and Habbie's How, were at the remote head of Glencross water, amidst the lonely, bleak, and distant wastes, beyond the venerable mansion of Lodging-House (*ibid.*, I:107).

In the same tirade Brown points out that "this summer, 1806, an inscribed stone, has been placed near the waterfall ... more than three miles distant." With the summer house and stone making the same claim miles apart, Brown sympathises with "the poor perplexed pedestrian poetical pilgrim, like the ass between his two trusses of straw, thus puzzled which side to turn" (*ibid.*, I: 106).

More information about this "inscribed stone" is given in the *Scots Magazine* for June 1810, in a "Proposal for erecting a Monument to Ramsay," in which "J. M'D." lamenting that Burns, Thomson and others "have received every mark of public approbation, while "our 'famous Allan' has received no honour."⁴¹ In venting his disappointment, the writer

³⁸ E.g., "Scenery of The Gentle Shepherd," *Gentle Shepherd* (1859), n. 30 above.

³⁹ *Critical Review*, 3rd Ser. 15 (November 1808): 227.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Scots Magazine*, 72 (June 1810): 419-421 (420); cf. more briefly, Lamont, 2018, as in n. 1 above, 219.

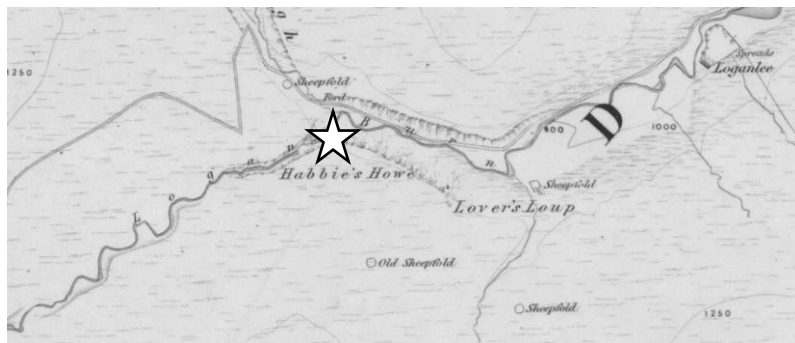


Fig. 9. From Sheet 11, Edinburghshire, Ordnance Survey, Six-inch series (Scotland), (1853), showing “Habbie’s Howe” and “Lover’s Loup.”

describes a “three feet high monument” in Habbie’s How, south-west of Glencross (*ibid.*: Fig 9). “A few years ago,” writes J. M’D, “some well meaning person, or persons, paid a ‘tribute to the Scottish muse,’ by setting up four rough stones at right angles, on which they laid a flat smooth stone, bearing the following most poetical inscription: ‘Let none presume for to abuse. / This stone erected to the Scottish muse’” (*ibid.*). This must be the same inscribed stone that was mentioned in Brown’s edition.

J. M’D., however, is concerned less with the stone’s location and more with its aesthetic, calling it a “sorry compliment” to Ramsay and to Scotland. In July, a response by “N. C. S. N.” points out Ramsay Lodge, Ramsay Garden, and the obelisk near Penicuik House, as proving that Ramsay’s memory has in fact been well preserved. He then denounces “Habbie’s How” as a “spot, falsely so called,” and boasts about commencing a subscription “for the erection of a Tower to the memory” of Ramsay “in the midst of the coinciding and genuine originals of his pastoral.”⁴² In September, J. M’D defends himself with yet another letter, assuring the readers that “the controversy concerning the real scene” is “by no means decided,” but holding on to the belief that the Habbie’s How in question may well be the real spot, and that time has simply taken its toll on an area which Ramsay had, after all, used his imagination to beautify.⁴³

Two years after his “Proposal,” J. M’D contributed a poem to the same magazine, titled “Verses Written at ‘Habby’s Howe,” in which he raised the same question about Ramsay idealising the landscape at Woodhouseless or it having deteriorated:

How bleak the aspect Nature wears

⁴² *Scots Magazine*, 72 (July 1810): 509-10; there is no evidence this tower was ever built.

⁴³ *Scots Magazine*, 72 (September 1810): 659.

Since Ramsay here her features drew!
Is she thus bowed down with years?
Or was the Poet's pen untrue?⁴⁴

The sixteen-verse poem ends with the writer walking away from the beloved spot of reflection, revealing a tradition of literary tourism persisting in the area despite so many attacks on its authenticity.

Other poets could also sidestep or ignore the controversy over an exact location. In 1823, in *Blackwood's Magazine*, a series of "Six Sonnets on the Scenery of the Esk" could still invoke Habbie's How as a reliable setting for the play:

Thou windest through the glens of Woodhouselee,
Where 'mid the song of bird, and hum of bee,
A bard with scenes Arcadian cloth'd thy side,
The pastoral Ramsay. — Lofty woods embower
Thy rocky bed 'mid Roslin's forest deep,
Above whose top time-hallowed ruins peep⁴⁵

What this culmination of commemoration in verse, wood, and stone highlights is the stubborn persistence of myth in literary history. The "poetic license" of Ramsay praised by the makers of these monuments is the same aspect of his writings that anyone can use to dismantle them. None of the sites in question are completely satisfactory. Even Newhall, the site that comes closest, was burdened by Robert Brown's determined attempts to sanctify the area as the undisputed site of *The Gentle Shepherd*. In the end his commemorations—his private monuments, his articles, his edition and annotations, his 1808 map—transformed the site into a *lieu de memoire*, superseding many of the genuine representations of the scenes Ramsay portrayed, if such a feat was even possible.

It is a little ironic that such an intense mode of literary tourism flowed from that brief, vague description of "a shepherd's village and fields some few miles from Edinburgh." It is more ironic that all of the memorials mentioned above—the Penicuik obelisk (1756, inscribed to Ramsay in 1759); the Woodhouselee summer house (late 1790s); the stone seat at Habbie's How (1806); and the obelisk and other commemorations in the grounds of Newhall House (1810)—have contributed to the mythos of Ramsay Country in the general Pentland Hills. The claims and counterclaims were often heated and disorienting, but in the end the claims are themselves shrines or tributes to Ramsay's work, testifying to its lasting impact for its readers. Forsyth's sensible suggestion that that the exact locale of *The Gentle Shepherd*, though inspired by reality, is

⁴⁴ *Scots Magazine*. September 1812, p. 704.

⁴⁵ *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*. Vol. XIV. July–December, 1823, p. 601.

“imaginary” explains why alternatives shrines have not drawn Ramsay devotees. Ramsay’s birthplace in Leadhills is often brushed over, and commemoration there has not been particularly strong.⁴⁶ Edinburgh, the city where Ramsay lived most of his life and where he died, remains perhaps the locale in which the man himself can be most vividly imagined. Yet neither Leadhills nor Edinburgh evokes his most famous and widely-influential work.

As the introduction to this volume shows, the age of commemoration is hardly a thing of the past. Since 2016, the Allan Ramsay Hotel, or “Ramsay Inn”, in Carlops, has been the venue of an annual Allan Ramsay Festival. Dinners, toasts, readings, dances, and recitals of poems and songs from the play have fed into that same intriguing mythos that was built over the course of the nineteenth century. But Murray Pittock’s lapidary inscription at the Ramsay Hotel boldly describes Ramsay, not only as author of *The Gentle Shepherd* “Set Near this Place,” but as “Founding Father of Romanticism & Modern Scottish Poetry.”^[1] While it may not draw the number of tourists who flock to the biographically-connected gift-shops and tea-rooms of the Lake District, Ramsay Country offers a glimpse, through the work of a great and original Scottish poet, into the birth of Romantic verse itself.

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⁴⁶ It seems that Ashlea Road was renamed Ramsay Road on 16 August 1949: cf. *Minutes of the County Council and Reports and Minutes of Committees of the Council and Other Documents Submitted to the Council* (Lanarkshire Council), p. 2382. The Leadhills Miners Library was for some time (and as recently as 1985) named Allan Ramsay Library, though it has since reverted to its original name.